

## Subsequent Role of the Cortes.

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his victory to the extent of effacing the old constitution, though he took summary vengeance on the ringleaders of revolt, and would not brook the policy of limiting the crown by the parliament. He had sometimes, as in 1538, when it refused to sanction the *sis*a, or duty on meat, to bear the affront of a refusal to his demands for extraordinary taxation. A large number of ordinances, based on its petitions throughout the reign, attest its practical influence on legislation. It insisted, too, that the laws passed by it should only be repealed whilst it was in session, in order that the reasons of such repeal should be submitted to it.

Despite these instances of self-assertion, however, the Cortes cannot be regarded as representative of the national will in any appreciable degree. To see in their assembly the modern parliament would be like mistaking the Scottish Convention of Royal Burghs for the Scottish National Assembly in the Parliament House, Edinburgh, or for the Imperial Parliament at Westminster. Not only did the nobles and clergy finally cease after 1538 to take part in its deliberations ; even the Deputies of the Third Estate, who henceforth composed it, could not claim to represent the mass of the communes. They merely represented the eighteen cities which possessed parliamentary rights, and even the majority of the representatives of these privileged eighteen were *regidores* who owed their appointments to crown patronage. The Cortes was thus largely an assembly of royal officials, who, as a rule, were capable of manipulation in the royal interest and only too amenable to royal gratifications. Parliamentary corruption sapped its moral as well as its representative strength. As compared with the Royal Council—the active and subservient instrument of the royal will, the strenuous agent of centralised authority—its functions and its influence were but limited.

The diminution of its power was accelerated by the autocratic devotee of egotism, superstition, and routine who succeeded the great emperor. Philip II. was a poor specimen of a king in many respects, but he believed himself equal to the divine mission of governing the greatest empire of the day, and toiled like a slave in prosecution of his aim of centring all power in himself. He could brook no remonstrances from the Cortes that limited his absolute right to do as he pleased.